

To: Planning and Economic Development Committee

Via: Gary Jackson, City Manager

From: Robert Griffin, Building Safety Director

Subject: Process Improvement Initiatives

The Building Safety Department has implemented process improvements during the last six-months that have improved the effectiveness and efficiency of the operations. Other City Departments, our internal customers, and the development and contracting community, our external customers, are the individualized focus of our initiatives. It is staff's objective to continue the metrics for determining efficiency, formal feedback from committees that provide feedback on effectiveness and efficiency, and internal analysis of operations to better our Department's customer service.

City wide improvements:

- The Information Technology Department, in conjunction with the vendor, upgraded the computerized permit program to allow customers the ability to review the tracking steps during the permit approval process for all City Departments via our eGov link at www.ashevillenc.gov. In addition, all required inspections and inspection results are listed for each permit.
- The Engineering and Planning Departments began using the Building module for all permit application and inspection processes. This process change was implemented with the changes identified above to better our technology available for customer service.
- Developed and implemented technology for Temporary Certificate of Occupancy approvals with all affected departments. Approval time has improved from nine days in November 2005 to three days in March 2006.

Development Services Center (application point for the City) improvements:

- Implemented the single application form as recommended by the Task Force in 2005 for commercial and residential projects.
- Developed a single-page application for use with Asheville Mall and Biltmore Square Mall when applying for a tenant up-fit of an existing space. Both Mall managements supply this form with their paperwork to new tenants.

- Implemented technology-based tracking system for each step of the application and plan review process. The metrics provided in this initiative resulted in changes of internal processes for operations. March 2006 applications are processed in the Development Services Center and routed to Building Safety Plan Review and other City Departments the same day, as compared to an average of three days prior to January 2006.
- All applicants are now given the application/permit number upon applying for the permit. This allows the customer to access the eGov, to follow the approval process and inspection process after the permit is approved.
- Reorganized the Development Services Center staff dedicating two permit facilitators to residential projects and one permit facilitator and the Senior Permit Facilitator to commercial projects. They provide the customer with their card and contact information for any questions during the approval process. The permit facilitators also provide information on the use of eGov at the application submittal.

Plan review improvements:

- Used the metrics from the tracking system implementation to change several internal processes. This has improved the turn-around time for Building Safety approval in small commercial projects from an average in December 2005 of 24.5 days to 12 days in April 2006.
- Instituted plan review waivers for one and two-family homes to licensed contractors and design professionals. A total of 35 permits have been issued with these waivers since December 2005.
- Developed a handout for residential deck construction, waived Building Safety plan review, and developed expedited set-back approvals with the Planning Department.

Code enforcement process improvements:

- Housing Code Enforcement Officers are inspecting all work when associated with a housing code repair. This reduces the number of inspectors on the job and improves efficiency and minimizing inconsistency issues.
- Building Safety inspectors are using technology for scheduling inspections. This allows the developer or contractor to confirm the inspection is scheduled.

- All ABC inspections are now assigned a permit number providing documentation, reducing confusion, and thereby improving the time for approval.

Other areas:

- Delivered an 8-hour electrical code seminar to contractors.
- Co-sponsored an Accessibility Code workshop for inspectors and design professionals.
- Became the second City in the State to be recognized as a delivery agency for the new mandatory continuing education requirements for inspectors.
- We provide at least 6-hours of code updates and consistency training for inspectors each month.